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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [UNSC](#) [AG](#) [MR](#) [WI](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA INFORMALS AND FRUSTRATIONS

REF: ALGIERS 0729 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Charge and A/PolCouns met August 13 with Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MFA) Director General for Multilateral Affairs Ambassador Nasser Bourita, who had just returned from Vienna where he participated in the August 10 and 11 informal talks on the Western Sahara held under the auspices of UNSYG Personal Envoy Ambassador Christopher Ross. Bourita was forthcoming and reflective in describing the atmospherics, participants and positions. He thought the atmospherics were positive, and he was of praise for Ross. Especially interesting was his discussion of the topics laid out by Ross, the role of referenda historically in resolving conflicts like the Western Sahara issue, and human rights as raised by the POLISARIO participants and addressed by Ross. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Bourita began by enumerating five issues identified by the UNSYG Personal Envoy to focus the two-day discussions: 1) the vision for the future of the Maghreb region over the next 20 years; 2) the future of the Sahrawi people; 3) the role of neighboring countries in resolving the dispute; 4) the role and importance of confidence building measures (CBMs); and 5) the importance of identifying principles for resolving the conflict.

¶3. (C) Bourita thought the topics were well conceived and appropriate, and in his estimation the less formal structure of the talks should have been conducive to some substantive discussion of these important issues. He praised the format and the organization of the meetings, but he pointed to a lack of flexibility on the part of the POLISARIO as an obstacle to real progress. According to Bourita, the POLISARIO delegation came with what he described as two preconditions: that there be a referendum that includes various options; and that independence be among them.

¶4. (C) Despite its inflexibility, the POLISARIO delegation participated while Algeria and Mauritania only attended the opening and the meals. Describing the Algerian delegation as &there for a holiday,⁸ Bourita compared Algeria,s presence in Vienna to similar behavior in New York. He opined that the Minister-Delegate for Foreign Affairs and his team considered themselves &only observers,⁸ adding that for Morocco, alternatively, they must be part of the solution. For Bourita, Mauritania was more amenable to discussion but felt constrained by Algeria. Bourita lamented that the talks could have been better; as it turned out, he called them very nearly "bilateral," between the Moroccan delegation and Ambassador Ross.

15. (C) Bourita highlighted Ross,s comments in response to POLISARIO insistence on a referendum to resolve the issue, relating how Ross asserted that it was not United Nations' or international practice to hold a referendum to resolve such disputes. In fact, apparently in only four of 20 similar cases have disputes been resolved through referenda; Bourita did not name the others cited by Ross, however.

16. (C) Bourita also praised Ross,s handling of the human rights issue when raised by the POLISARIO, relating how the UNSYG Personal Envoy countered with pointed questions when the POLISARIO delegation raised human rights in Western Sahara, asking why there had been no mention of the issue prior to 2007 if, in fact, alleged abuses had been taking place since 1975. Apparently, Ross also criticized the POLISARIO for grandstanding about human rights rather than working to address individual cases.

17. (C) The MFA Director General for Multilateral Affairs reiterated that the Moroccan delegation did not travel to Vienna to impose a solution but to present ideas, especially given that UN efforts since 1991, and fighting before that, had borne no fruit. He described the POLISARIO as part of the solution, with a leading role to play in the implementation of the autonomy plan, and he stressed that the Moroccan proposal was not designed to defeat the POLISARIO. He even intimated that the POLISARIO could be compensated for playing a constructive role, if it so chose, by taking credit for pushing Morocco to promote the autonomy plan. The Moroccan delegation was not in Vienna, he said, to revisit the past, but to look ahead. However, Algeria and the POLISARIO were not ready to move, concluded Bourita.

18. (U) Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Taieb Fassi Fihri, who headed the Moroccan delegation, told the media that the Vienna informals afforded an opportunity &to recall the purpose and philosophy of the Moroccan autonomy initiative.8 He deplored other parties, clinging to old visions and mechanisms. However, he also said that as a result of the informals, Morocco was ready to resume negotiations.

19. (C) Comment: Unsurprisingly, Ambassador Bourita echoed many of the Minister,s themes as he spoke at length, at times animatedly, about the Vienna talks. Despite the relaxed format, substance and well organized approach, both Fassi Fihri and Bourita made it clear that they felt the POLISARIO and Algeria were not earnest interlocutors. At the same time, neither gave any indication that Morocco was willing to reconsider the proposed autonomy plan as the basis for negotiation. With Morocco unlikely to reverse its position and accept a referendum that includes independence as an option, it may be necessary for us to urge Algeria and the POLISARIO to negotiate more seriously when the talks move back to Manhasset. End comment.

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Jackson